Mahlon and Mary Alice Hunt
Around 1951

Reflections
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This is a photo of my mom and dad, Mahlon Hunt and Mary Alice Dear Hunt. The photo was included with three other images that my dad had set aside at some point, probably a couple of decades ago, when he was going through old photographs and pulling out ones that mattered to him. It seems like a little packet he had made either to have scanned or to place in an album. The other photos were of the snow shed at Cape Horn, the old swinging bridge on the Wind River, and one of his favorite pictures of Mount St. Helens taken from an airplane. Those were meaningful images to my dad, and this one was tucked in with them. Those other three images have been shared here in this group recently.

This is not the best-quality print, and it has clearly been cropped in. I may eventually find the rest of the photos from this same batch and perhaps even locate a better, uncropped copy. But even as it is, there is a lot here to look at. The question I keep coming back to is: where was this photo taken? At first, I wondered if it might have been in Virginia, when my dad was in boot camp and my mom went down to be with him during his time off. She had stories about working in a department store there and seeing the "white only" and "black only" drinking fountains, which made a strong impression on her. That was one possibility.

But the more I look at the photo, the more I lean toward Camas—possibly even the Camas Inn. My dad worked at the mill and lived in Camas for a while in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and the room has the look of a rented room or hotel room rather than a permanent home. There is a cigarette stand, a plain Fire-King cup, and an ashtray. The wallpaper and the little framed pictures on the wall also have that temporary-room feeling. But the strongest clue, at least to me, is what looks like a Pendleton blanket thrown over the couch. If you look at the side of the couch poking through, it appears that it may have been a pull-out couch. That feels very much like the sort of furnishing that might have been in one of the rooms at the Camas Inn. I would love to see the full design of that blanket today.

There is another little clue in the picture that means a lot to me. Look at my dad's left hand. His little finger was damaged when he worked at the mill. When I was growing up, he told me that his finger had been caught in a machine and bent between the joints. As a little kid, maybe five years old, I was fascinated by it. He never had it straightened, and he told me it gave him a better grip. I thought that was completely cool. I am not sure whether the damage is visible in this photo, but the wedding ring is, and that places this after he and my mom were married.

There is also a family story tied to that damaged finger. My dad once told me that before he met my mother, he had been dating a young woman named Mary. While he was out of work recovering from the injury to his finger, she became engaged to Ray Garcia. I grew up with Greg Garcia, and his older brother Rick was the same age as my brother Mick. So, in some strange alternate version of history, the Garcias could almost have been my brothers. My dad lost that round because of a bent little finger, and somehow that bent little finger became part of the story that led to me being here.

Recently, while I was in Denver helping my dad's younger sister, Katherine Ann, move into a long-term living arrangement, I asked her how my mom and dad met. Katherine Ann is an amazing woman. She served as a Baptist missionary in Cameroon for eight years during the 1960s, and when I asked her how many babies she had delivered, she said it was hard to count, then matter-of-factly answered, "3,000." While we were telling family stories, I asked her about my parents, because somehow I had never really heard the story of how they first met.

According to Katherine Ann, my dad was working at the paper mill, and my mom was working there too. I had not known that part. Evidently, there were quite a few women working in that part of the factory, and my dad, who was a good-looking young guy, seems to have been a bit of a ladies' man. The way my aunt told it, he was giving the new employee, Mary Alice, a bad time—challenging her, teasing her, perhaps telling her that she could not glue a certain number of bags in a certain amount of time. In other words, he was pushing his luck.

And Mary Alice, my mom, turned around with a brush and a pot of glue and smeared it across his face.

That, apparently, is how they met.

And honestly, that story sums up my mom pretty well. She was not about to put up with some young man giving her grief on the factory floor. But there they are in this photograph, married, sitting together, looking young and happy. Maybe this was taken in Camas before he went off to Korea, before they had a permanent home, during that brief in-between time when everything was still forming.

On reflection, however, there are other possible Camas locations. This could be the interior of one of the first houses they rented after they began living together—perhaps even their very first home. One was up on Prune Hill, just after climbing the steep hill and rounding the corner, in a house directly to the right. They also lived in another rented house out toward Woodburn, east of Round Lake - almost Fern Prairie . Either house is a possibility, and the actual location remains uncertain.

I am filling in some of the blanks, of course. Some of this is memory, some of it is family story, and some of it is simply me studying the details in the photograph and imagining the setting around it. But that is what makes these old photos so fascinating. A cropped print, a blanket over a couch, an ashtray, a bent little finger, a lost girlfriend named Mary, long-lost Garcia brothers, and a pot of glue on the factory floor. That is the story hiding in this picture.